1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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of the house is only a few years married. His brother is as yet unprovided for and still lives with him. Both frequent young men's meetings. 573

The old men's house includes all the adult farm fathers of complete families whose children have just succeeded or are nearly ready to succeed them, with two exceptions. It brings in, too, two others, O'Loughlin, the silent old bachelor, and John Quin, whose status among the old age group is still provisional. The interviews already quoted have given an insight into the function this meeting performs for the community. The behavior of the group points again to the same function. This is the seat of judgment in the community. It is the clearing house of information and the court of opinion in which the decisions of the community are reached and the traditional knowledge of the peasantry applied and disseminated. From these meetings the men return home to their wives and sons, and the formulations they have reached spread thus through the community of individuals who share life in Rynamona. 573 621 208 887

Let us examine the type of topic that comes up in the old men's meetings. If we want to assure ourselves that the meeting has the influence its members ascribe to it, a glance at the conversation that takes place there should bear them out.

The old men's meeting is an informal gathering. It arises in response to the community's interests and its immemorial custom. Naturally, different personalities and personal idiosyncrasies make the gathering slightly different in each rural community. Occasionally it may be absent altogether for various causes, such as the dying-off of a central member of the group. Often there is a sort of interregnum between one generation of old men and the next. This was the case in one Clare community studied by the authors. There the old men had lost the central figure of their group and, diminished in number, spent most of their time in enfeebled 573 887

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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loneliness at home. Two new cliques of slightly younger "old men" were competing for central position in the community.

But despite such variation from community to community, the old men's *cuairds* act very similarly. The topics brought up and debated upon are much the same from year to year and place to place. First in importance, however, are those concerning agriculture. Times of sowing, reaping, harvesting are debated; the merits of various seeds are disputed; shop and fair prices are compared; and the community's trade often affected thus. The "old men" are conservative farmers, as are most peasants, and an innovation must be thoroughly tested before it wins, here in the evening *cuaird*, the approval of the community. Traditional methods of farming receive their strongest support here in the web of legend, proverb, and reference to the past that the speakers weave around them.

Much of the community's relation to the outer world is debated here and determined by the old men's agreement. In late years, this has come to be called "politics." It is here that petitions for roads, for relief work in winter, for extension of agricultural prize schemes, and all the "political" business of the county council and its committees originates on the side of the local community. It is here too that the community reaches its unanimity in party voting. In Rynamona, for example, it was felt that it was in the interest of all that there should be no dissension on the score of politics. The old men's *cuaird* debated the matter and agreed upon support of Fianna Fail, the De Valera party, an allegiance it held for the years 1927 to the time of the authors' visits. Even O'Halloran, whose private views leaned in another direction, begged the authors that no word of his political heterodoxy be allowed to reach the ears of his neighbors. "I wouldn't want them to think I wasn't with them," he said.

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Here it is too that the community makes its appraisal of its own members and those with whom it is in contact. And that appraisal tells quite heavily in the behavior the community will adopt toward the person or condition appraised. Even the priest finds each of his acts and even his sermons discussed and debated in the evening *cuaird*, and he "gets a name" according to the decision reached. In Rynamona an incident occurred which shows the type of slow appraisal the community makes and the speed with which, once its judgment is formed, it puts its decision into action. Not far away in the same general region, a gentlewoman moved back after years of absence to a small manor house which the family had had for many years. She was unknown to the farmers and, despite her friendly interest in them, seemed to be unable to establish contact with them. This distressed her, the more that her kindness seemed ineffectual in putting an end to the inevitable petty pilfering which she knew she must expect. One day, about a year later, her horse bolted on the country road. An expert horsewoman, she soon brought him into control. Thereafter her luck with the country people changed. Her exploit had made the rounds of the local community and had won approval for her. The old men agreed she was a grand lady and had a great hand with horses. And the petty pilfering sank to manageable proportions.

The community regulates its internal affairs through the *cuaird* as well. It is here public opinion is formulated. There is nothing formal about the decisions made upon the incidents arising from day to day. The local community has no implement with which to enforce its will. But it has the power of gossip and in action the power which in the critical days of the land agitation won itself an international name: the boycott.

In a later section the sanctions the local community exercises will be discussed. It is sufficient here to point out

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this role of the *cuaird*. An example from another community than Rynamona will throw the type of action it can take into relief.

An "incomplete family" affords the example. It was made up of an old woman and her thirty-year-old son. Theirs was a poor farm, and ordinarily they would have been an object of commiseration. But they were not. In fact, they were a constant annoyance. The son was generally regarded as bad and lazy. He neglected his farm and exhibited an obstinate disregard of village opinion in which his mother abetted him. The result was, naturally, that their house was shunned and he went nowhere to *cuaird*.

But no crisis arose till the episode of the pig. One autumn the son brought home a large Irish white sow. The sow was more nimble than most of her kind, and neither the mother nor the son took any pains to keep her at home. She wandered through the village at will and soon devastated many a cabbage patch. The village took alarm, and the more so that the sow might well prove dangerous to young children. There were angry words among the women, and the men for once backed them up. In the *cuaird* it was hinted that the sow might be found dead one morning. But before such an event could take place, the son took warning and sold the pig. "Public pressure," if you will, forced his decision and resolved the conflict, but it left him as low as ever in the village's esteem.

And lastly, the *cuaird* is the seat of traditional lore and entertainment. Its members are the repositories of folklore and legend. And the official belief of the countryside finds its expression and its reaffirmation in the discussion of events and the recounting of histories and incidents. In communities still at least partly Irish-speaking, such as Luogh, most of its members are *seanachaidhthe*, storytellers in the traditional vein. And it is among them that traditional repertories of a saga, folk tale, song, and legend still get an

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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562 561 terms are summaries of status in farm economy, family life, and the cliques of the community.

834 208 Consequently the comment and attitude of the small farmers toward sexual behavior cannot be divorced from their appreciation of status in family and community. For them sexual behavior is merely one aspect, not of individual personality, but of sociological role. If one turns to any record of the sort of commentary and discussion the small farmers carry on among themselves, both in the semi-public discussion of the *cuaird* and in the more private talk of conversation among friends of a common age and status, one encounters a characteristic set of remarks and evaluations. These are for the most part discussions of specific persons in specific events. The attitudes expressed are directed now toward persons, now toward general conditions, now toward moral or ethical imperatives, now toward cosmological principle. Yet always, if sex is the subject, the status of the actors and the interests of the familist farm economy are the themes.

562 842 Women are valued and praised for their fecundity. All this is part of generally accepted convention among the small farmers, and such conversations as the following are not in the least unusual, despite the very great modesty and reticence of the farmers. A small farmer is praising an old woman, the head of the household, to one of the authors and contrasting her to her son's wife, both being listeners:

> Here is a woman that has no more milk of her own. They shouldn't allow a woman like that to breed because a man should always keep his wife in the milk. The old woman, God bless her, raised every child with the didi [breast].

369 831 The country-bred boy and girl grow up in an atmosphere of constant reference to sex and breeding. There seems to be little of the ignorance about such matters which the townsman delights so in attributing to country people. In Ireland, no less than elsewhere in the world, the antagonism between town and country often expresses itself in such

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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joking ascription of ignorance and stupidity. In Ireland, 369
however, there is another side of the expression of town 831
and country distrust. The countryside points to prostitution and immorality in the towns and finds something to back up its condemnations. The town returns its dislike with double measure and accuses the countryside of primitive lack of all sensitivity of feeling or restraint of impulse. But these antagonistic attitudes and ways of regarding other groups than one's own are not our concern here. They are of interest here because such ascriptions of ignorance are part of a common misapprehension of the complexity of the peasant attitudes.

For instance, to an outsider the countrymen will seem 369
often to give a mere lip service to the attitudes of the 834
townsman, for one is always apt to mistake the function of 208
hearty laughter. The country people have strict moral and ethical attitudes around the question of sex, as rigid as those of any other class if not more so. Yet they have conventional licenses and conventional niceties which do not coincide with those of the other classes and are thus open to misunderstanding. And, like all classes and peoples, they have two sets of attitudes, not one, and these are "ambivalent," to adopt the Freudian term.

But these attitudes and their "ambivalent" nature, the kind of alternation they seem to present, must be understood in terms of the social relationships of the countryside. The greatest single cause of misapprehension lies here. In different contexts, toward different persons, in connection with different events, one and the same person regards the same subjects quite differently.

For example, in discussions of the peccadillos of young 369
people and the censurable events of the district the farmers 834
and their wives were full of animus against the "crabbit" 208
great "bucks" of lads who led girls astray and from whom 522
the innocent were not safe. Yet even then, in discussing the fault of such amorous lads and the necessity of circum-

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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spection and immediate and frequent confession for girls as their best defense, one sees that the pure young maidens are also not without blame. They bear the taint of Eve. "Sure the boys have no chance," said one woman in this respect, "for the girls always lay the blame on them." Yet these attitudes coexist together with other very hearty, casual, and sometimes ribald attitudes which make their appearance in banter, joke, and repartee even between speakers of different sex. These even take the form of taunts about prowess and mild ridicule for the possession of a greater relish than is meet, or fanciful recitation of past magnificent misdeeds. This is particularly true in the recitations of stories and adventures of persons in the ken of the community, where details of amorous desire and accomplishment are given with considerable gusto, and greeted and reiterated again and again amid hearty laughter.

369 834 208 [178]

Certain observers profess to find the puritanical outlook on sexual matters on the increase in the countryside. The country people themselves purport to see a change in their own outlook. And it may be that the last generation has brought a considerable spread of Catholic moral standards with the spread of education and the opening of the countryside to urban influence.

In any event the laughter and hearty guffaws with which references of nearly any kind to sexual intercourse, sexual attraction, and childbearing are greeted, and the evident interest they evoke, are very much part of the everyday behavior of the small farmers. They do not imply in any sense an approval or acceptance of the deeds described. They are rather expressions of a very definite judgment. They are in the nature of a condemnation in which laughter is itself a sanction upon the forbidden.[1]

[1] The authors accept readily the view of laughter as a response to a situation where socially conditioned values are threatened with upset and yet not so deeply or irrevocably broken as to bring out a full reproval. The view is well developed by Pilkington and agrees with that of Max Eastman. The tabloid reader is not

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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The "earthiness" and the ribaldry of the country people is not an antithesis to their strict moral code. Rather it reinforces it. It gives its pietistic and too-respectable, churchly and town-bourgeois aspects an authentic, indigenous touch. Even more important, it makes for a modification of the conventional attitudes which fit them for the country people's social life.

In this ambivalence of attitude one can see the identifications between status in human relations and norms about sexual behavior more clearly. The one view, that "holiness" denies sex, can be reserved to suit the non-procreant statuses of family life. The other, the hearty and open view embodying animal analogy, frank interest, overt desire, can be reserved for the persons whose roles in social life allow free rein to the amatory and procreative urges.

For the small farmers marriages are for the purpose of producing children and assuring continuity of descent and ownership. They are "forever." They are indissoluble. Sexual relations are part of marriage, its pleasure and its duty. They lead to children if one is fortunate and strong and potent. It is the will of God. One may regret that one's childbearing came so early. There might have been more time for free enjoyment. But it is a regret to which one resigns oneself easily.

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weakening his horror of murder or his distaste for adulterous behavior, however familiar his tabloid-viewing may make them. Similarly the Englishman reading his detective stories and the Frenchman listening to his *chanteuses* are merely indulging vicarious "thrills." All of them are going through a playful rehearsal of the conditioned reflexes of social sanction, indignation, rage, and punitive action in the same way a dog growls and bares his fangs at his play fighting. The idea may seem a bit ludicrous in itself, and it will offend the moralists. But let them remember that in most persons moral and ethical activity is absolutely unreasoned, spontaneous, and without any kind of intellectual support at all. It is pure reflex. Like any other reflex, it must be kept alive by a constant restimulation. Only overzealous priests, reformers, teachers, "nice people," and prudes miss this point. They fail to understand that vulgarity often hides far stricter morality than hypocritic cant. This laughter represents a constant and not unpleasurable reiteration of the accepted canons of morality upon so important a matter.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

able degree, has been dominated by parents who have allowed him to take on few major responsibilities, has a mother who acts as a wife surrogate in all but the sexual sphere (at least consciously), has established a routinized existence, and has male companions for whom he feels affection and with whom he shares numerous work and recreational activities. Some men who have been promised or willed land, and who have consenting parents and brides-to-be, will balk at a match because they are "too happy with the lads," and, if persuaded to marry, they will attempt to retain as much of their bachelor role as possible within marriage—"The men run with the boys before marriage and carry on the same afterward." Several bachelors and spinsters almost have married several times in succession, only to find the sexual commitment on each occasion too difficult to make at the last moment.

Before the coming of a permanent priest to Inis Beag, it is asserted that young people contemplating marriage were able to "keep company" frequently and openly before the union was arranged, and that some pairings were "love matches." But since then—with the separation of the sexes from late infancy on, the ubiquity of gossip and opprobrium, and the actions of priests—courting almost has disappeared, and it is not uncommon for a couple awaiting their wedding to have little personal knowledge of one another. Contact on the island between the sexes today is limited to meetings at the few parties which take place, at the occasional summer dances, or *céilí*, held on a large flagging near the school, and sometimes "at the well" or "walking to the cow" during daylight hours. Two generations ago, private Sunday afternoon strolls afforded young men and women the opportunity of coming to know one another well, but these "rambles" about the island are done now only by couples of the same sex—one of the several manifestations of institutionalized friendship. Choice once again seems to be intruding into matchmaking, however, with the increasing demands of acculturated youths for marriage with "love."

Matches are the end product either of secret bargaining between the families involved which can extend for weeks, or of the impetuous act of a man who—goaded by companions or by stout, or both—will visit the home of his "chosen" after dark to negotiate, accompanied by a kinsman or close friend. The bargain, once made, is sealed by the male participants with the emptying of a bottle of whiskey brought by the prospective groom, after which a boy or young man of the household is sent out—often after midnight—to summon relatives and acquaintances for a night long party, known as the *cleambnas* (the word for matchmaking in Gaelic). Sometimes this party is followed by as many as three more on consecutive nights, the expense for which is borne by the family of the bride-to-be. When the bargaining is protracted, it usually is done during the 12 days of Christmas or the final fortnight of Lent, and the match is announced soon after Epiphany or Easter. Hearsay concerning possible matches abounds at these times, but each year "most rumors are dry," unless, of course, "with a lot of drinking and urging a man might decide to take the plunge." It was customary in the past for the wedding to take place four days after the *cleambnas*, but now the service must wait from one to three weeks until the genealogies of the families of the bride and groom are examined by the parish priest to determine their degree of consanguinity.

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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626 own words and actions in the presence of others so that the fires of factionalism are not ignited. Equally feared are informers of the curate and relatives or close friends of persons in an audience who might be offended by a heedless remark brought to their attention by the listeners.

83 It is sometimes heard in Ireland, from those aware of, and willing
154 to admit, the fact, that the inability of most Irish to "share themselves"
182 with one another, even husbands and wives, is a heritage of the fear of
[626] gossip—a fear that one's intimate revelations will become common knowledge and lead to censure and "loss of face." A more likely explanation, according to those of Freudian bent, is the Oedipus configuration, which numbers among its many effects the following: the prevalence of romantic attachments and the rarity of conjugal love; the lack of sexual foreplay, marked by little or no concern with the female breast; the brevity of the coital act and the frequent spurning of the woman following it; the need to degrade the woman in the sexual encounter and the belief that the "good" woman does not like sex, and, conversely, that the sexually disposed woman is by virtue of the fact "bad." All of these widely reported phenomena bespeak the overwhelming influence of the mother image.

157 Ridicule and opprobrium, as well as satire in song and tale, are
[626] effective control mechanisms in light of the emphasis placed by Inis Beag
[123] folk on saving face. Most islanders could not believe that I was author of the ballad referred to in footnote 5 because several stanzas attack my character; they find it difficult to conceive of anyone publicly proclaiming
• [208] their own faults, under any circumstances. Opinions, once formed, are
[577] clung to tenaciously, even in light of obviating circumstances, since to alter them would be an admittance that they were ill advised in the first instance. The folk pride themselves on being able to judge a stranger's character immediately on meeting him, and this initial impression is
[533] rarely modified no matter how long their interaction continues. A seldom
[539] revealed tradition of satirical balladry exists in Inis Beag, but its employ-
[576] ment is infrequent and then calculated according to singer and audience so as not to offend directly. Apprehensiveness and anxiety about real and imagined ego assaults by others are dominant personality traits of the islanders.